

DR. ROBERT S. BENNETT, PAGE 1, "FILE NO. RM-8626"

Before the

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554

Comments in Opposition to Petition

In the matter of:

Petition to Eliminate all )  
One-Way Transmissions on )  
Amateur Radio Service bands )  
below 30 MHz. )

File Number RM-8626

Reference: Section 97.3(a)(23)

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To the Secretary of the Commission:

1. INTRODUCTION

The referenced petition from Frederick O. Maia, who holds an Amateur Extra Class license with the call sign W5YI, addresses a problem of growing concern on the high frequency bands assigned to the Amateur Service. Specifically, the growing number of "news" bulletins and code practice transmissions cannot be justified in the limited spectrum available. Some of these transmissions unfortunately reflect personal vanity on the part of the operators, and are thinly veiled editorial broadcasts, rather than a true service to the Amateur community. Section 97.3(a)(23) is indeed "a very permissive category and taken in its broadest context, permits just about anything to be transmitted that is even remotely associated with the Amateur Service," as Mr. Maia states in the petition.

On the other hand, news bulletins and code practice from a few, well regulated stations do serve a need within the Amateur community. This need has existed since the origination of the Amateur service, and continues even in 1995. Modification of Section 97.3(a)(23) may well be necessary, but its elimination would not be in the best interest of the Amateur service.

2. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE UNDERSIGNED

The undersigned has held an Amateur Radio License and operated on the amateur bands from 3.5 through 2400 MHz since 1953. He currently holds an Advanced class license. He has been a member of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) since 1953, but has never been an elected official or employee of that organization. He served on the ARRL VHF/UHF Advisory Committee from 1982 through 1993, and is presently chairman of the ARRL Spectrum Management Committee. These are uncompensated appointed positions.

He earned a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering from the Johns Hopkins University, and has served on the faculty of that school as well as teaching Electrical Engineering courses for the Engineering Society of Baltimore. He has worked in the analysis and simulation of military weapons, including radio and radar propagation, for more than 30 years. None of his income is derived from Amateur Radio, and he has no interest in the outcome of the referenced petition other than a concern for the best interest of Amateur Radio operators.

3. SPECIFIC RESPONSE TO THE PETITION

It is the belief of the undersigned that, while Section 97.3(a)(23) may need revision to reduce the proliferation of one-way, broadcast-type transmissions below 30 MHz, and to ensure that these transmissions are directly applicable to Amateur operations, elimination of ALL such transmissions would effectively throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Mr. Maia states that "such transmissions do not comport with normal operating practices and, in 1995, they have outlived their usefulness." Timely news concerning Amateur radio technical developments and rules changes is of vital importance to Amateur operators, and except for an entry-level license, code proficiency is still a requirement for Amateur licensing. Mr. Maia believes that information can be obtained by the Amateur by subscribing to on-line computer services, and that computers can fill the need for code practice.

Amateur Radio is a unique avocation in that it is first and foremost a means of communications. Reasonably equipped stations represent a considerable investment in time, money, and ingenuity on the part of the Amateur. To suggest that information of importance to the Amateur community should be disseminated by means of computers connected to commercial telephone lines, using a network to which access must be purchased, rather than by Amateur radio, borders on absurdity.

Code practice is indeed available on computer disks, as well as on tapes and other recording media. If one's only goal were to

learn to copy machine-sent code, and thus pass the test for a higher class of Amateur license, these would be fine. If the goal is to become a skilled radio operator, code must be copied in the real environment of atmospheric noise, fading, interfering signals, and even intentional jamming. There is no substitute for live practice, even in 1995.

Both of Mr. Maia's suggested alternatives to bulletin or code practice stations require access to a personal computer, and one would also require on-line (by telephone) service access. Some Amateur operators, (certainly not all), have computers available for this purpose, but not all of those are inclined to spend the money for on-line access. Similarly, not all have the interest or funds to equip their stations with VHF packet capability. This leaves HF transmission from bulletin and code stations, received on the existing Amateur station receiver, as a very worthwhile means of providing news and code practice.

Mr. Maia is "personally distressed at the level of anger that now exists" on the high frequency bands when one-way transmissions interrupt communications in progress. This is a justified concern, resulting from too many such transmissions. A limitation is indeed needed. He goes on to say that he is "especially concerned about the impact that this anger and the resulting malicious interference has on relatively new amateurs who are increasingly upgrading their Technician VHF Amateur operator licenses to include the long range high frequency operation"

The malicious interference certainly sets a bad example for newcomers. But put the blame where it belongs - the interfering stations are breaking the law. Is Mr. Maia suggesting that they are not at fault because they cannot control their anger at QRM? The argument, "I shouldn't be blamed because he made me do it," is something most of us leave behind at fourth grade.

If the Commission is to take any action, it should be along the lines of reducing, but not eliminating, the useful bulletin and code practice sessions. The American Radio Relay League, Inc., has a history of operating an excellent bulletin and code station, with responsible news content and a widely published schedule. The frequencies used by this station, W1AW in Newington, Connecticut, are not "assigned for the exclusive use" of W1AW, but their use at pre-published times is more in line with a "schedule" similar to those used throughout the world by Amateur operators. Modifications to the frequencies used by W1AW have, from time to time, been changed in a spirit of cooperation in selecting transmitting channels.

The sponsoring organization of W1AW has 172,462 members, or nearly 27 percent of US licensed Amateur operators. Its policies, including the operation of W1AW, are set through a democratic process involving all members. Its station should not be silenced

in a noble but ill-advised attempt to reduce interference on the high frequency Amateur bands.

4. SUMMARY

While something should be done to reduce and regulate the one-way transmission of news bulletins and code practice on the high frequency Amateur bands, the service provided to the Amateur community of a station such as W1AW operated by the American Radio Relay League, Inc., is important enough to preserve. Elimination of Section 97.3(a)(23) would, in addition to resolving the current abuse of the one-way transmission privilege, shut down W1AW. This would not be in the best interest of the Amateur community. Therefore, it is requested that the petition listed as File No. RM-8628 be dismissed, and that alternative solutions to the problem be sought.

Respectfully Submitted,

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